

Statement of Larry Combest
Chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture
before the
Committee on House Administration

March 1, 2001

Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today with my good friend and Ranking Member, Charlie Stenholm.

I would first like to offer my congratulations on your election as Chairman of the Committee. You have my very best wishes for a long and happy Chairmanship.

Mr. Chairman, the Agriculture Committee has a long tradition of fiscal responsibility and true comity among its Members. The problems of American Agriculture are our greatest concern. In this spirit, we have proposed a budget for the 107th Congress. Mr. Chairman, omnibus agricultural legislation expires in this Congress. That is a measure dealing with all aspects of American Agriculture. Seven years ago, Congress passed the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform (FAIR) Act. That new legislation was designed to totally revamp federal farm programs. Since its passage, agriculture has endured three years of collapsed prices, leading to three years of emergency federal assistance. It is the Agriculture Committee's job in this Congress to discover what aspects of the farm bill worked well, what did not meet expectations and what will work for the future.

To do this we will need every staff person allowed us under the Speaker's staff ceiling of 1995. At the end of last year, the majority staff had six vacancies. Four of

these vacancies have been filled in the last few weeks. We hope to fill the two remaining positions by the end of this month. The minority staff had two vacancies throughout the 106th Congress for lack of funds.

Our Travel budget for the 107th Congress has increased in anticipation of the number of field hearings necessary for the Farm Bill. Out of 50 requests for field hearings, 30 have been budgeted as potential sites. Ten of these sites are our Democrat Members' districts.

The Equipment category has also increased for the 107th Congress. I believe most Members will agree that computer upgrades are no longer an optional item. In the past, a significant amount of funds for computer equipment have come from the Majority Salary Account. With all majority staff slots being filled in the 107th, that money will not be available for equipment needs. To remedy this, we have included the costs of these upgrades in the Equipment Category. In addition, the change in the House's purchase plan from a three-year plan to a two-year plan increases annual costs in this Category.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have concerning our Budget Proposal.